

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Favorable reconsideration of the present application is respectfully requested.

Claim 1 has been amended to more positively recite the method steps thereof. The scope of the claim is not believed to have been substantially altered.

The claimed invention is directed to a method for manufacturing a reduced metal including a carbonaceous reductant disposed on a hearth moving in a reducing furnace by supplying fuel and primary combustion air to the reducing furnace via a plurality of primary burners, and supplying secondary air to the reducing furnace via a plurality of secondary burners, wherein at least the secondary combustion air is oxygen enriched air and the oxygen concentration in the primary combustion air is controlled to be lower than that in the secondary combustion air.

Claims 1-6 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as being obvious over any of U.S. patent 6,749,664 (Hoffman), U.S. patent 5,730,775 (Meissner et al.) or U.S. patent 6,284,017 (Kamei et al.), taken in view of U.S. patent 6,129,777 (Fuji et al.), wherein Fuji et al. was cited to teach providing a supply of secondary combustion air to burn combustible gas generated from the carbonaceous material in the vicinity of the iron oxide agglomerates to decrease the amount of fuel required for heating.

Applicants wish to thank Examiner McNelis for the courtesy of an interview on July 25, 2006 at which time the outstanding rejection was discussed. In particular, Applicants pointed out that the portion of Fuji et al. upon which the Examiner had relied (column 4, lines 23-31) disclosed supplying a secondary combustion air to burn combustible gases released from the iron oxide agglomerates and carbonaceous material, but that Fuji et al. fails to disclose that at least the secondary combustion air is oxygen enriched air, or that the oxygen concentration of the primary combustion air is controlled to be lower than the oxygen concentration in the secondary combustion air. Applicants additionally pointed out that the

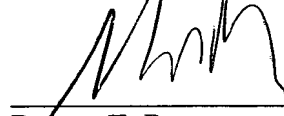
Office Action did not allege that this feature was taught in the prior art. Based upon this discussion, it is Applicants' understanding that the aforementioned rejection, as well as the rejection of Claims 2 and 3 as being obvious over the above references plus Nishimura, would be withdrawn.

Applicants therefore believe that the present application is in a condition for allowance and respectfully solicit an early Notice of Allowability.

Respectfully submitted,

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